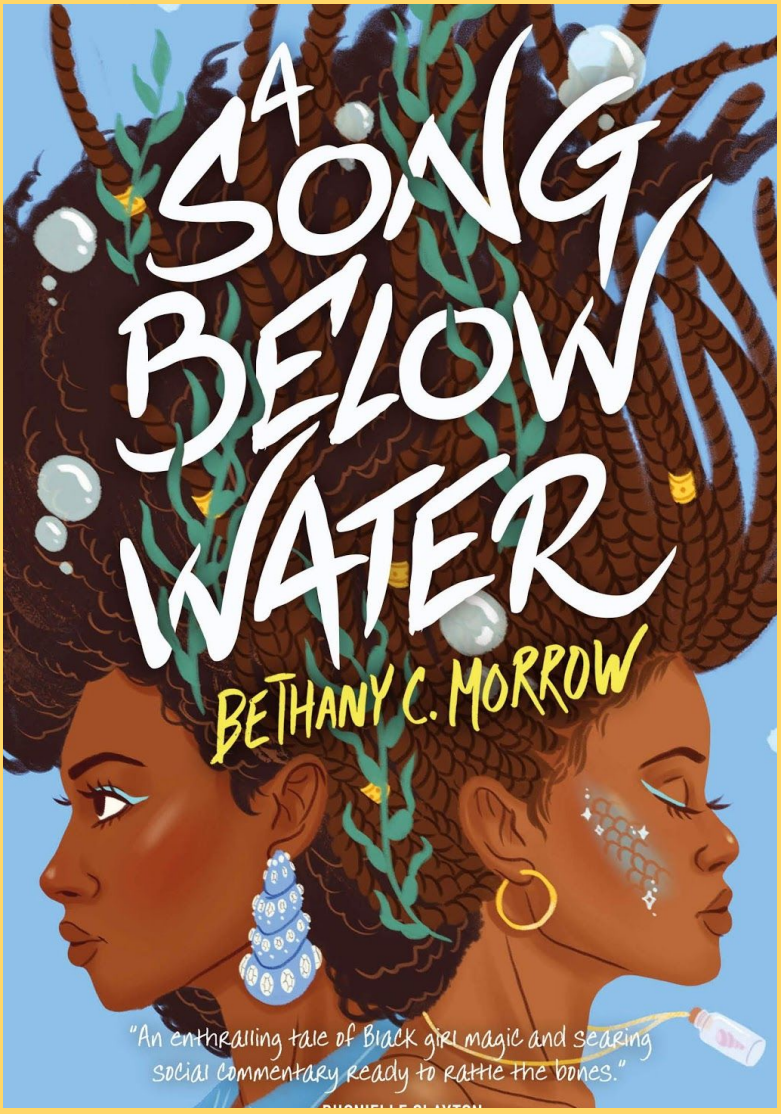
READING IS RESISTANCE

ABRIDGED YA LESSON PLAN



Song Below Water by Bethany C. Morrow

GUIDED ANTI-BIAS/ANTI-RACIST READING | GRADES 4+

INTRODUCTION
This lesson is divided into 4 sections that are designed to follow along with the book *A Song Below Water* by Bethany C. Morrow. In this lesson, written by Zapoura Newton-Calvert, each section focuses on reading comprehension, critical thinking, and self-reflection based on the Teaching Tolerance Social Justice Standards. We provide discussion questions, reflection prompts, and activities as guides.

CHECK OUT OR PURCHASE THE BOOK
Find the book at your local library, or purchase the book from the Reading Is Resistance Book Shop. 10% commission goes back into our organization for operating costs, and another 10% is donated to independent bookstores.

OBJECTIVES
This guided reading lesson is designed to be part of a larger life-long commitment to anti-racist teaching and learning for the student and the facilitator. Reading Is Resistance sees reading as an opportunity to seed deeper conversations and opportunities for action around racial equity in our communities. We hold the belief that being anti-racist is a process of learning (and unlearning) over time.

The Teaching Tolerance Social Justice Standards (focused on Identity, Diversity, Justice, and Action) serve as guides for our work.

ABRIDGED LESSON PLAN SECTION ONE: CH 1-6

SUMMARY

We meet main characters Tavia (a siren) and Effie (who plays a mermaid at a summer Renaissance Fair). They are Black high school students in a predominantly white city -- Portland, Oregon.

Just a little way into the book, the news announces that Rhoda Taylor, a Black woman and possibly a siren, has been killed. We find out that there is a long history of sirens, all Black women, being silenced and violently harmed or murdered. We also discover that Effie has a mysterious secret and that Tavia's voice is extremely powerful.

SAMPLE DISCUSSION QUESTION

- ❏ Let's talk about identity and how our identities impact the way we experience the world AND the way we may experience this book.
  - ❏ What do we learn about Tavia's and Effie's various group identities?
  - ❏ When/where are they most and least comfortable talking about themselves and their identities? Why? **IDENTITY DOMAIN #5**

ABRIDGED LESSON PLAN SECTION TWO: CH 7-12

SUMMARY

Tavia gets pulled over by the police and uses her siren call as protection. Of course, using her call also puts her in danger by revealing who she is. There's a roller coaster of plot action when Rhoda Taylor's boyfriend gets a not guilty of murder verdict, and Camilla Fox, a famous Black YouTuber, reveals that she is a siren. The section ends with Tavia finding a new siren call -- Awaken.

In this section of the book, Morrow critiques Portland's white liberals in a chilling scene referencing Devonte Hart and the Hart family murders.

SAMPLE DISCUSSION QUESTION

- ❏ What is the significance of choosing Portland, Oregon, and showcasing the Hart case in this story? What is the impact on you as a reader? What is the impact on the narrative of using this real example from the region? **JUSTICE DOMAIN #13**

ABRIDGED SECTION THREE: CH 13-16

SUMMARY

A protest is organized after a young Black man is shot by police; this coincides with threats to Camilla Fox and other sirens who are speaking out against their oppression.

We see very different understandings of and participation in this protest by characters with different racial identities. Non-Black characters talk about protesting for school credit and for fun, while Black sirens are protesting to defend their lives.

Tavia feels her voice freed, but Camilla is violently collared by the police and Gargy carries Tavia away. And then there's the moment when we find out that Effie has been connected to humans turning into stone. What will happen next?

SAMPLE DISCUSSION QUESTION

- ❏ How does the Seattle protest scene portray the tension and the power of collective action in this region?

ABRIDGED SECTION FOUR: CH 17-END

SUMMARY

A pivotal showdown happens at prom night. Effie is revealed to be a gorgon. She and Tavia's unique powers are now out in the open.

Both young women move more deeply into their power, connected in profound and immediate ways to their ancestral roots (personified by Effie's dad and Tavia's grandmother). And we end uncertain of what their future holds but sure that they will not mask themselves or their voices again.

SAMPLE DISCUSSION QUESTION

- ❏ What is the larger message in this book about voice -- the impact of suppression of voices and identities and the power of freedom of voice?

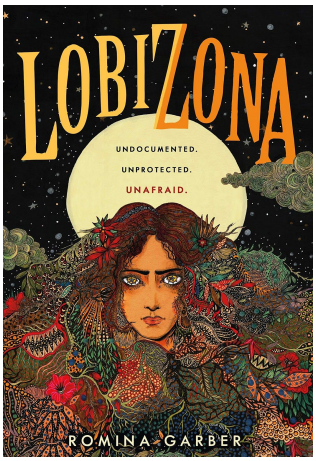
WHAT'S NEXT?

RESOURCES

These resources are designed as a choose-your-own adventure of possible pathways to dive more deeply into a few of the book's themes. Use these to develop additional content OR share these with older readers and let them explore as they wish. (included in the full-length lesson plan)

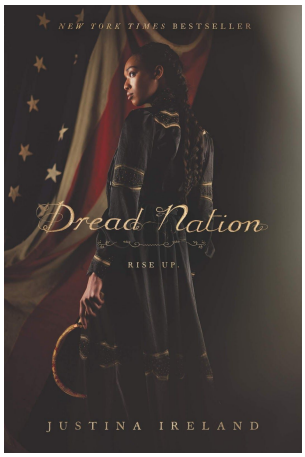
READ NEXT

The Mermaid, the Witch, and the Sea by Maggie Tokuda-Hall



Lobizona by Romina Garbert

A Blade So Black by L.L. McKinney



Dread Nation by Justina Ireland